

**Governor's Rural Affairs Council
Meeting Minutes – March 8, 2018**

1. **The meeting was called to order by Lt. Governor Evelyn Sanguinetti at 1:00 pm.** Lt. Governor announced that if members of the public are in attendance, and are interested in providing remarks to the council, they should please sign in with Susan Bence.

2. **Roll Call**

Member Agencies Present:

Illinois Department of Agriculture, Rebecca Clark (phone)
Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, Erika Kennett
Illinois Department of Employment Security, Shelly Tweedy
Illinois Department of Human Services, Francisco Alvarado (phone)
Illinois Department of Natural Resources, Ed Cross
Illinois Department of Public Health, Heidi Clark
Illinois Department of Transportation, Holly Ostdick
Illinois Environmental Protection Agency, Christine Davis
Illinois Community College Board, LaVonne Nelson
University of Illinois Cooperative Extension Service, Anne Silvis
Illinois Housing Development Authority, Bill Pluta
Southern Illinois University, Nina Antoniotti
Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs, Christopher Merrett
Illinois Finance Authority, Patrick Evans
Rural Partners, Molly Hammond

Not Present: Illinois Department of Aging, Illinois State Board of Education, Illinois Farm Bureau

Citizen Members Present:

Luke Allen (phone)
Todd Kaeb
Sonja Reece
Larry Richards

Nonvoting Members Present:

Doug Wilson, USDA
Norman Walzer, NIU

Lt. Governor's Office Present:

Evelyn Sanguinetti
Derek Cantu
Susan Wynn Bence
Brian Costin

Quorum determined.

3. Opening Remarks

Lt. Governor Sanguinetti welcomed everyone to the Governor's Rural Affairs Council (GRAC). She expressed her excitement to be able to work with so many supporters of innovative rural development initiatives to improve the quality of life in rural Illinois. She expressed, that as members of the GRAC, we have a tremendous opportunity to identify what works for our communities, what doesn't, and how we can move forward to support those living in rural Illinois.

She gave a special thanks to the Institute for Rural Affairs for coordinating the Rural Community Economic Development Conference which was held on March 7 - 8, 2018, in Springfield.

4. Approval of Meeting Minutes from July 19, 2017.

Lt. Governor Sanguinetti announced that a draft of the minutes from the December meeting had been provided to council members prior to today's meeting along with a hard copy today. She inquired if there were any corrections to the minutes. Since there were no corrections, she requested a motion to approve the minutes. Shelly Tweedy made a motion to approve the minutes. The motion was seconded by Lavon Nelson. Motion passed. Minutes were approved.

5. Approval of Working Group Meeting Minutes

Lt. Governor Sanguinetti inquired if there were any corrections to the working group minutes. Since there were no corrections, she requested a motion to approve the minutes. Ed Cross made a motion to approve the minutes. The motion was seconded by Todd Kaeb. Motion passed. Minutes were approved.

6. Doug Wilson – Director Rural Development, US Department of Agriculture

Lt. Governor Sanguinetti introduced Illinois' newly appointed Director of Rural Development for the US Department of Agriculture (USDA), Doug Wilson. She noted that Director Wilson has previously served on the GRAC in this position. The Lt. Governor provided a brief bio of Director Wilson and welcomed him to the GRAC.

Doug Wilson stated that he is the new/old state director. He is happy to be back in this position and he looks forward to working with everyone. He announced that the USDA is concentrating on five core topics:

- a. Connectivity to Rural America
- b. Improving Quality of Life
- c. Rural Workforce Development
- d. Technological Innovations
- e. Rural Economic Development

He explained that the USDA is currently involved in working with hospitals/clinics, etc. to help prevent/stop opioid addiction. He directed everyone to their website: www.usda.gov/topic/opioids. He noted that he is looking forward in coordinating with the Lt. Governor and building relationships within the State of Illinois.

Lt. Governor Sanguinetti thanked Doug for his comments. She asked if there were any follow up questions.

Nina Antoniotti made a few comments about USDA programs that are available although these programs do require a percentage of match. She noted that a policy change to reduce the match would be helpful. She also mentioned that most people do not realize this type of funding is available and that more education is needed. She expressed that funding for internet connectivity is needed.

Todd Kaeb asked if there will be additional funds for opioid emergencies. Specifically, will there be federal funds available at the state level.

Doug Wilson said yes, he thinks that funding will be available.

Lt. Governor Sanguinetti stated that \$40 million has been secured through federal funds to be used for education about opioids, Narcon (a drug that can be readily administered to reverse the effects of an opioid overdose), and the creation and staffing of a 1-800 number that people can call for help.

Doug Wilson mentioned that there is a home ownership program that may be available. He explained that properties are received back to the USDA which may not be able to be sold. These homes sometimes can be used for a safe haven, etc. This might be an additional avenue to help those affected by the opioid abuse. The USDA will work to help those individuals receive an opportunity to own a home.

Chris Merrett asked what the trajectory of USDA-Rural Development was going forward in terms of federal funding in future USDA budgets and the Farm Bill. Specifically, how can we as non-USDA employees advocate for continued funding for USDA-Rural Development?

Doug Wilson explained if programs receive good support sometimes more funding is provided for said programs. He stated he is happy to have advocates for rural development and hopes that funding will be determined by Congress soon. After the funding levels are determined, he will have a better idea of the state funding level.

Sonja Reece asked if a website is available that shows the houses that the USDA owns.

Doug Wilson stated that if a group has an interest in housing, please call the State of Illinois USDA Housing Program Director. He advised working with this group to determine if properties are available.

Shelly Tweedy noted K-12 virtual learning education is needed. Molly Hammond explained that the USDA DLT (Distance, Learning, and Telemedicine) program grants are for districts to help with virtual learning and Telehealth. Schools can also apply for this grant. LaVonne wanted to know if this grant was available to fund community colleges. Doug stated he thinks that colleges can apply. Patrick Evans asked if the grant would also be available for home schooling. Doug said yes but only for the fiber to the home.

The Lt. Governor thanked Doug for his comments.

7. Guidebook to Modernizing Local Service Delivery Systems – Norman Walzer

Lt. Governor Sanguinetti explained that Norm Walzer, Northern Illinois University, Center for Governmental Studies, will be providing an update on a project that he has been working on called the Guidebook to Modernizing Local Service Delivery Systems. Professor Walzer's presentation included forecasting on demographics, economic and service needs using data at the county level. The challenge for many rural counties is that while population and its tax base has declined, its local government infrastructure has remained the same. His study explores strategies to find more efficient ways to manage local government. These strategies include shared services, consolidations, and innovative uses of technology. The guidebook is designed to help counties anticipate problems now that could potentially emerge in five to ten years. An online county dashboard of county government services, costs, and performance is proposed. The ultimate goal of the guidebook and this research is to help local governments anticipate challenges and find solutions now, rather than waiting for local problems to reach a crisis stage.

Lt. Governor Sanguinetti asked if there any questions for Norm.

Larry Richards noted that several schools in his area have consolidated due to low populations, but unfortunately, that causes long bus commutes for students.

Nina Antoniotti stated that some classrooms can be connected to other schools to help provide training to avoid busing.

Patrick Evans asked if any research explains why populations are decreasing in certain areas.

Norm Walzer explained how the projections were made and examples of what would be included in the guidebook.

Bill Pluta said that the aging population is also facing housing issues. He stated is observation is that the elderly population will grow and need more services.

Norm Walzer agreed that the elderly are the fast growing population cohort in rural Illinois. He challenged the GRAC to find answers to the question, "How do we get young adults to Illinois to live and work?" Norm noted that the workforce is also shrinking.

Shelly Tweedy (Illinois Department of Employment Security) stated that her agency has economic and labor force information on their website. This information can provide data on industrial growth, wages, and labor. In addition, the IDES can provide information necessary to create economic forecast reports for specific regions or areas.

The Lt. Governor thanked Norm for his presentation.

8. Annual Report Discussion – Chris Merrett

Lt. Governor Sanguinetti explained that the GRAC has a Memorandum of Understanding with the Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs to expand the GRAC's research relationship with Chris Merrett and his team at WIU. She further explained that Chris is able conduct research and collect data for her office and the GRAC to help with recommendations to the Governor and the General Assembly.

In addition to this general role, the IIRA is responsible for submitting an annual report on behalf of the GRAC and the office of the Lt. Governor. The purpose of this report is to provide a snapshot of current conditions in rural Illinois, while making recommendations for improving conditions in rural communities. The Lt. Governor requested that each GRAC member agency and GRAC working group submit a summary report to either Chris Merrett or Susan Bence by April 27, 2018. Chris Merrett shared a proposed timeline for the annual report. His goal is to have the data by the May 2 meeting with a draft provided of the report by the July GRAC meeting. He stated he needs and appreciates the input from the GRAC and working group summaries and individual GRAC member summaries.

Chris explained that with population under 25 reducing, consequently, the future workforce is declining. One focus for the report is how to maintain population and stabilize the population. In a sense, the report could respond to the point raised by Norm Walzer on how to retain and grow the population of younger people in rural Illinois.

LaVonne Nelson asked if the report is the appropriate place to put these topics. She asked is the state overall in crisis? Are other states in population crisis mode and where is Illinois ranked compared to other states? Lastly, how can we make this a statewide issue?

Chris explained that there are some similarities between rural and urban Illinois communities in terms of population declines among younger age cohorts. However, there are differences, too. He noted that something is going in rural and downstate Illinois communities. These issues are independent of issues in urban areas, particularly in the Chicago area. He believes we need to concentrate on how to deliver services in rural areas since the plan would be different for urban areas.

Norm explained that the IIRA was originally founded as an applied research and best practice organization. From here, the GRAC was to pick up ideas and move these ideas forward in state agencies and state government. At that point, Rural Partners was to implement these ideas. He suggested that it might be time to renew this coordinated approach. He asked, "What can we do to implement and make it happen?"

The Lt. Governor thanked Chris for his report and reminded all the deadline is April 27, 2018, to have reports submitted to both Chris and Susan.

9. Working Group Summaries

Lt. Governor Sanguinetti explained there are four main focus areas for which working groups were created to develop strategies and goals. The working groups include:

- Health – Co-Chaired by Sonja Reece and Larry Richards
- Workforce Development – Co-Chaired by Norm Walzer and Doug Hanks
- Economic Development – Co-Chaired by Todd Kaeb and Heather Hampton Knodle
- Education – Co-Chaired by Lucas Allen and Chris Merrett

The Lt. Governor stated that two groups have met since our last meeting. She requested that the education working group provide an update at this time.

Lucas Allen reported that the group is working on the idea of offering resource fairs in rural areas during school registration times. This would allow families to discuss issues with resource personnel such as health/human services, SNAP, broadband, online Ag education, and career tech fields.

Another idea being discussed is to provide grant accountability as a statewide initiative.

The Lt. Governor thanked the education working group. She then requested the Economic Development working group provide a report.

Todd Kaeb stated this working group has been discussing:

- a. What works in nearby states regarding tax credits – such as education or infrastructure tax credits?
- b. Transition of wealth – create programs (e.g. community foundations) to keep wealth local.
- c. Promote tourism - Rte. 66 – where is the money coming from and where's it going? Bring money in from outside state of Illinois.
- d. Improve economy by investing in local

The Lt. Governor thanked the working group for the summary. She also thanked Todd personally for keeping his business in Illinois rather than relocating it outside of Illinois.

10. New Business

Lt. Governor Sanguinetti requested that Brian Costin explain the 2018 Spring Flood Outlook report.

Brian Costin explained that Governor Rauner declared a state disaster for a few counties due to flooding. He mentioned that currently there are not any requests for state assistance to shelters, and of the operating shelters, all have closed or are on standby. He further explained that many counties had flood damage. Brian provided a brief flood outlook as provided by EMA.

The Lt. Governor thanked Brian for his comments.

She announced the following dates (Locations TBA) for the 2018 GRAC meetings:

- a. 5/2/18 – TBA
- b. 7/18/18 – TBA
- c. 12/5/18 – TBA

Calendar items:

- a. Illinois State Fair – August 9-19, 2018
- b. DuQuoin State Fair – August 24 – September 3, 2018
- c. Farm Progress Show – August 28-30, 2018

11. Member Updates and Reports

Nina Antoniotti announced that SIU Telehealth Payers Summit will be held March 15, 2018.

Bill Pluta stated the Housing Authority is undertaking community revitalization for technical assistance. He requested that all view the PowerPoint that was presented at the IIRA Conference. This will be posted on the IIRA's website in the next few days at www.iira.org.

Chris Merrett thanked the Lt. Governor for attending the IIRA conference and the social hour. He also thanked Norm Walzer for 29 years of conference leadership and Sandy Wittig for the logistics of the conference.

Christine Davis stated the IEPA is focusing on protecting the environment and improving the economy with its Resource Conservation Development Areas. She mentioned that perhaps the GRAC would like to look into this program.

Francisco Alvarado mentioned that the Illinois Department of Human Services is working on a community electronic calendar.

Holly Ostdick announced that the Illinois Department of Transportation is funding freight infrastructure improvement. This information is on their website with applications due April 6, 2018. She also noted that there are research funds for transportation related projects.

Rebecca Clark announced that the Illinois Department of Agriculture will host Ag Legislative Day at the Capitol on April 11, 2018. If you would like to attend, please send her an email.

Patrick Evan announced that the Illinois Finance Authority has programs available to help veterans become entrepreneurs.

Susan Bence announced that Molly Hammond is expecting her fourth child. The Lt. Governor expressed her congratulations.

The Lt. Governor thanked everyone for their comments and updates.

12. Public Comment

There was no public comment.

13. Adjournment

The Lt. Governor thanked everyone for their time and dedication.

Doug Wilson made a motion to adjourn. Nina Antoniotti seconded the motion. Motion passed. The meeting was adjourned at 2:37 pm.

The Lt. Governor requested that all stay for the upcoming Narcon training.

Respectfully Submitted:

Chris Merrett
Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs
Western Illinois University